

Volume 10, Issue 2, 2025

Humanitarian crisis in Nigeria: A threat to child protection

Promise Jude EMORDI; Department of Arts and Humanities, School of General Studies, Delta State Polytechnic, Ogwashi-Uku; Nigeria; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1809-7958>; judeokonji024@gmail.com; emordi.promise@mydspg.edu.ng

Ikechuckwu Augustine ITULU; Department of Cooperative Economics and Management, School of Business Studies, Delta State Polytechnic, Ogwashi-Uku; Nigeria

Chekume Anthony OKOLIE; Department of Public Administration and Local Government, University of Nigeria, Nsukka; Nigeria; anthony.okolie@unn.edu.ng

Abstract

Nigeria is facing a prolonged humanitarian crisis, characterised by internal security threats in the form of armed conflict and flooding in the northern part of the country. These twin humanitarian crises have paved the way for the displacement of children and hampered their accessibility and affordability of the necessities of life. This crisis has severe consequences for child protection, affecting 8.8 million individuals, 80% of whom are women and children. The resulting effects include a significant increase in out-of-school children, currently estimated at 20 million, as well as a rise in internally displaced children, orphans, and child soldiers. The Nigerian government has initiated efforts to address this crisis through the Safe School Initiative and the National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme, but their impact on improving child protection remains uncertain. Through a mixed-method approach, informed by the Ubuntu and systems theories, the study investigated the relationship between the humanitarian crisis and deficiencies in child protection in Nigeria. The study found that humanitarian crises have denied children access to education and healthcare, which endangers their future sustainability as drivers of development. The paper recommends that the bottom-up approach should be adopted in initiating and executing child protection policies, while improved funding is also critical, since no meaningful development can occur without healthy and educated children.

Keywords: humanitarian crisis, child protection, displacement, armed conflict, Nigeria.

Cite as:

Emordi, P.J., Utulu, I.A. and Okolie, C.A. (2025). Humanitarian crisis in Nigeria: A threat to child protection. *People Centred – The Journal of Development Administration*, 10(2), 44-57. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/jda.v10i2.5>

Introduction

Globally, humanitarian crises are on the rise, with over 75.9 million people internally displaced due to internal insecurity challenges and natural disasters (International Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2024). This alarming statistic highlights the failure of many states to fulfil their fundamental duty to protect the lives and properties of their citizens, a critical aspect of the social contract. Despite the political ideologies that shape various countries around the world, child protection against harm and need is beyond the purview of parents. Rather, the state has a legitimised role to play in this regard (Berrick, Gilbert, & Skivenes, 2023).

Children are among the most vulnerable, particularly in developing countries where poverty, illiteracy, and other burdens prevent them from enjoying their basic rights to education, healthcare, and other essential services. The Nigerian state, with a population estimated at over 200 million, is characterised by having children and youths constitute 60% of its demographic composition. Apparently, the protection of children from harm remains one of the cardinal responsibilities of the state. Nevertheless, the failure of the Nigerian state to tame the humanitarian crisis posed by non-state actors coupled with natural disasters such as floods is likely to undermine the efforts of the Nigerian government in entrenching effective child protection.

The inimical activities of these non-state actors alongside the reoccurring floods have brought about loss of lives, distortion of livelihoods, and forceful displacements and, in no small measure, add to the insecurity concerns confronting the Nigerian state. Presently, about 8.8 million people and 4.9 million children are in need of humanitarian assistance (Punch Editorial, 2025). Moreover, 20 million children are out of school, and 17.5 million are orphans (Global Centre for Responsibility to Protect, 2022, cited in Ojo, Oyewole, & Aina, 2023).

To this end, this study aims to investigate the nexus between humanitarian crises in Northern Nigeria and the threats they pose to child protection. Furthermore, it will assess the effectiveness of various government policies and programmes aimed at improving children's welfare and enhancing their protection. Five sections structure the study: a literature review based on identified themes, a theoretical framework, methodology, analysis and findings, and conclusions.

The term "humanitarian crisis" entails the events that are critical in nature that pose a threat to the safety, health, well-being, or survival of a given society or country (Humanitarian Coalition, 2013, as cited in Okoli & Lortyer, 2014). A humanitarian crisis, also known as a humanitarian disaster, refers to a singular event or a series of events that pose significant threats to the health, safety, or well-being of a community or large group of people. Unresolved internal and external conflicts can, in the real sense, degenerate into humanitarian crises and spread to other geographical areas of a given state (Gupta, Kumar & Sinha, 2023).

Child welfare has been likened to child protection, and it includes keeping children from various forms of harm such as violence, neglect, abuse, and exploitation. Child protection is broad and encompasses the identification and prompt response to instances of harm and providing the necessary preventive measures to ensure children's security and well-being (Katz et al., 2021). Save the Children, a nongovernmental organisation, opined that child protection is largely based on certain mechanisms and structures put in place in order to circumvent the neglect, abuse, misuse, and exploitation, as well as every violent and coercive use of force that might jeopardise the lives and well-being of children (Save the Children, 2007).

Theoretical framework

This study relied on the Ubuntu and systems theory as its analytical framework. Ubuntu is characterised by values such as humanness, consciousness, caring, sharing, respect, compassion, and communality, which foster a cohesive and qualitative community life (Asamoah & Yeboah-Assiamah, 2019). These values guide ethical behaviour and prescribe the relational norms within African communities, promoting attitudes of civility, tolerance, collaboration, solidarity, and reconciliation (Etieyibo, 2017). The philosophy of Ubuntu asserts that a person's identity and humanity are intricately linked to their community (Mbiti, cited in Lutz, 2009). This interconnectedness means individuals are never fully independent but are part of a system, which is crucial to achieve a harmonious and balanced society (Ramose, 2015).

The interconnectedness of this theory closely aligns with the systems theory which was pioneered by Bertalanffy (1950), Talcott Parsons (1951), and David Easton (1965). A system, according to Aristotle, entails the whole, which is essential when compared to the component units making up the whole (Muriel, 1995). According to Dike

(2017), a system has several interconnected sub-systems that exist in unison so as to realise a common goal. Thus, a breakdown in any of the sub-systems will hamper the collective objective targeted to be achieved.

Application of the theories

Since both theories share the interconnectedness principles and Ubuntu further recognises communal responsibility, this was captured in the work of scholars like Gever, Talabi, Adefemi, Bello, Oluyemi, and Apuke (2024), who argue that the state's neglect of vulnerable children has profound societal repercussions. Both theories see this neglect as a breach of the basic principle that the community's health is tied to each person's. The Nigerian government's inability to safeguard lives and properties from threats such as terrorism, banditry, and natural disasters like floods has translated to a breakdown in communal responsibility. This failure displaces citizens, causing the loss of lives, properties, and livelihoods, which in turn undermines the well-being as well as their protection against harm. The government's failure to provide social safety nets means many parents, having lost their means of livelihood, are unable to fulfil their roles as providers. Consequently, children are forced into child labour-related activities, including hawking, begging, becoming child soldiers, or being exploited as sex slaves. These child protection deficiencies emanated due to the untamed humanitarian crisis that has been exacerbated by insecurity and floods, leaving 20 million school-aged children out of school, 17.5 million orphaned, and 11 million children suffering from food poverty (Falaju, 2024).

Concomitantly, the reoccurring nature of floods and insecurity threats has also paved the way for the destruction of lives and properties as well as healthcare and educational facilities. Those injured and displaced from their homes eventually locate themselves in internally displaced persons camps (IDPs). The flood disaster has submerged many schools and affected many school facilities that are essential for effective teaching and learning. The floods have also turned some schools into temporary shelters for flood relief victims, affecting most healthcare centres. Armed non-state actors have relentlessly attacked these centres and destroyed others. These events have restricted children's access to and affordability of education and healthcare services, contributing to the country's poor performance in the fight against illiteracy, as 68 million Nigerians are illiterate (Vanguard, 2018). Furthermore, Nigeria accounts for 31% of malaria-induced deaths that occur among children (Daily Trust, 2024). Floods account for the displacement of 650,000 children between 2016 and 2021 (Punch, 2023). These have severely undermined the Ubuntu principle of collective care and support.

Methodology

This study adopted an exploratory, mixed-method research design. The study made use of a non-probability, purposive sampling strategy for the recruitment of participants spread across academic and general-purpose online communities on Facebook and WhatsApp. 108 participants' responses were generated for the study. The primary data were collected between July and September 2025. The desk review, conducted within the qualitative research paradigm, was used to source secondary data from journal articles, magazines, newspapers and other internet sources. The majority of the secondary data used satisfied the inclusion criteria for relevance, credibility, trustworthiness, and variability. Thus, most data time frames spanned from 2009 to 2024. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the primary data for the study, as obtained from the online survey carried out. This analysis method yielded insights based on the respondents' responses that further corroborate or contrast inferences derived from secondary sources of data. The qualitative descriptive method of data analysis, which is based on content analysis, was employed to synthesise and interpret the collected secondary data (Okeke, Orji, & Aniche, 2014).

The justification of the above is premised on Phillips (1976), who emphasised that the study's objectives should guide the selection of a research design, not adherence to established techniques or the influence of other researchers' reputations. The main thing is to do a competent inquiry by choosing a research design that is capable of answering the research question (Denscombe, 2002). The mixed-method approach was selected for this study due to its effectiveness in bringing together both primary and secondary sources of information so as to enhance our understanding of the humanitarian crisis in Nigeria and its impact on child protection. Furthermore, this method is suitable for exploratory research in an insecure environment that hinders the collection of primary data physically.

Insecurity and flood: A threat to child protection in Nigeria

Globally, floods account for the closure of schools, affecting 404 million students' access to education (Aina, 2024). An opinion poll by the Vanguard newspaper showed that most Nigerians agreed that children have been easy targets and most often victims of social problems, even with all the current wave of insurgency, banditry,

kidnapping for ransom, and ritual-based killings, as well as natural disasters like floods creating humanitarian crises in Nigeria (Vanguard, 2024). UNICEF has documented alarmingly that extensive destruction, damage, or looting has forced over 1,400 schools, primarily in Nigeria's northeast, to cease operations. This crisis has gravely disrupted the educational trajectories of more than 600,000 children, depriving them of critical learning opportunities (Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, 2018). Between 2009 and 2015, Boko Haram terrorists destroyed 910 schools and forced the closure of 1,500 in the northeast. During this period, 952,029 school-age children were displaced due to regional security challenges. Only 10% of these children had access to formal education through specially arranged voluntary teachers in government-reserved internally displaced people (IDP) camps. The remaining 90% lacked access to formal education, as they were left with their parents in shanty IDPs (Human Rights Watch, 2016; Baba-Ibrahim, 2024).

School-age girls are often kidnapped by bandits for sexual services, exploitation, forced marriages, and labour. While the boys are used for hard labour and as human shields against state forces. The persistent kidnapping and use of schools as temporary relief sites and military grounds have drastically affected school enrolment and completion rates (Oladoyin, Osimen, & Dada, 2024).

The insecurity challenges between the Nigerian state actors and the non-state actors like Boko Haram insurgents and bandits have deepened since children are easily lured and forcefully recruited to play the role of child soldiers. The use of children as child soldiers is not limited to Nigeria. Globally, child soldiers have been estimated to have skyrocketed to 460 million, a geometrical increase from 99 million in 1990 (Daily Trust, 2022). In Nigeria, insurgents have also forcefully recruited children for combatant and non-combatant roles. From 2009 to 2016, insurgents recruited 8,000 children as child soldiers, and the United Nations documented the recruitment of 1,385 children for unscrupulous activities (Achilli, 2024). From 2015 to 2023, 63,111 people were killed by insecurity, many of whom were parents. This has forced surviving children to engage in child labour, sexual exploitation, and other illegal activities to support their families (Achilli, 2024).

Armed conflicts have limited healthcare accessibility. Over 700 health facilities have been destroyed since 2016 in northeast Nigeria (Poirier, 2012, as cited in Abdulrahim et al., 2023). In the same vein, Aisha, a mother, recounted how the prolonged insecurity in Zamfara State has led to the destruction of some major health facilities. Currently, these facilities are deserted, with little or no staff, and the required medication for the treatment of malaria, a common sickness prevalent in children, is not easily accessible. This made her embark on a risky journey to Gummi, Zamfara State, in order to enable her child to receive malaria treatment despite the risks of being killed or kidnapped on the unsecured road. The area has also witnessed a surge in the spread of preventable diseases due to the desertion of health facilities by health workers, whose lives are at risk while delivering healthcare services to the populace (Reliefweb, 2024).

The widespread malnutrition among children is attributed to floods and insecurity, thereby increasing their risk of stunting (Ojeleke, Bonuedi & Pavlova, 2024). The insecurity in northern Nigeria is responsible for the malnutrition of 17 million children, placing Nigeria first in Africa and second worldwide in terms of the burden of child malnutrition (Premium Times, 2022). Many parents, having lost their means of livelihood due to insecurity and floods, have resolved to send their children to beg for food and alms in order to provide for the family. This unholy shift of parental responsibilities from parents to children has exposed many children, irrespective of their age and gender, to the dangers of being kidnapped, killed, forcefully converted into child soldiers, early marriage, child labour and trafficking, illegal trade activities, abuse, misuse and neglect.

On the other hand, children in IDP camps face acute food shortages, exacerbating the crisis of hunger and malnutrition (Premium Times, 2022). Nigeria accounts for 31% of global malaria deaths, predominantly affecting children in rural communities. The destruction of healthcare facilities further limits parents' ability to improve their children's well-being since the few available ones are either far away from their reach or they are financially incapacitated due to the out-of-pocket neoliberal healthcare system that is operational in Nigeria (UNICEF, 2022). The World Health Organisation projects that over 800,000 Nigerian children die annually from preventable diseases due to inadequate healthcare services, exacerbated by insecurity and floods (Premium Times, 2025).

According to UNICEF, poverty, insecurity, early child marriage and religious extremism account for the little progress recorded so far in the fight against illiteracy, as Nigeria lags in achieving over 90% literacy through a functional and sustainable basic education system when compared with South Africa (Punch Editorial, 2023). The report noted that Nigeria's literacy rate is still low. The literacy data presented by the National Bureau of Statistics as reported in Punch Editorial (2023) revealed that most northern states are lagging, with Yobe State having the lowest literacy rate of 7.23%, Zamfara 19.16%, Katsina 10.36%, and Sokoto 15.01%. 72% of children between

ages 6 and 16 had never attended high school in Borno, 58% in Yobe and 52% in Bauchi. On the other hand, 1.6 million school-age children are out of school in the northeast states of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa, while the northwest has 3.5 million, the highest in the country. North-central had 1.3 million.

Floods in Africa account for the displacement of 1.85 million children in 2022, which is an increase from the 1 million children affected in 2021. The 2022 flood affected 64% of households in Nigeria, destroying lives, properties, and livelihoods and limiting access to food. Properties worth \$9 billion were destroyed, submerging farmlands and collapsing basic infrastructure (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). According to Dataphyte (2020), floods account for 94% of all displacements in Nigeria, while the remaining 6% were instigated by insecurity. Again, 26 states out of the 36 federating states in Nigeria were affected by floods. Thus, over 2.4 million internal displacements occurred during the period in view. It should be noted that flood-induced displacement in 2022 surpasses the 2015 highest insecurity-induced displacement that totalled 737,000. The 2022 flood brought about the displacement of 427,000 children (The Cable, 2024). A report by Punch (2023) indicated that between 2016 and 2021, floods accounted for the displacement of 650,000 Nigerian children, while over a million others are threatened by climate change.

Evaluating child protection programmes in Nigeria: The Safe School Initiative and the National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme in perspective

The safe school initiative

The abduction of 276 Chibok schoolgirls by Boko Haram insurgents in 2014 drew international attention and sympathy, prompting the Nigerian government to seek viable solutions. In response, Gordon Brown, the United Nations Special Envoy for Global Education, launched the Safe School Initiative (SSI) in Nigeria. The initiative aimed to secure 50% of public schools at risk, with a medium-term plan covering 2023–2026. The federal government allocated N15 billion to initiate the programme in 18 states, with an estimated N1,444 billion required for full implementation from 2023 to 2026. Annual funding needs were projected at N32 billion, N36 billion, N37 billion, and N38 billion, respectively (Nwaogu, 2024).

Despite these efforts, the SSI faces significant challenges. The previous administration budgeted N15 billion for 2023, leaving a N12 billion funding gap to be filled by states, private actors, and international donors. However, many security-challenged states have not provided the necessary matching funds. Bauchi and Gombe are making progress by identifying vulnerable schools and including SSI in their budgets. States targeted for SSI implementation include Borno, Adamawa, Kaduna, Yobe, Niger, Zamfara, Katsina, Kebbi, Jigawa, Sokoto, the Federal Capital Territory, Plateau, Benue, Taraba, Kogi, and Bauchi.

Critically, the Nigerian government has identified susceptible schools but failed to protect them from further attacks (BusinessDay, 2024). Nwaogu (2024) notes that the 2024 federal budget omitted the SSI, revealing a blame-shifting dynamic between the Ministry of Budget and National Planning and the Ministry of Finance over this exclusion.

A significant and contentious issue with SSI implementation is the lack of transparency and accountability in fund management. Questions have arisen regarding the disbursement and utilisation of the USD 10 million pledged at SSI's launch, with calls for the Attorney General and Minister of Justice to investigate the mismanagement or diversion of the USD 30 million allocated for SSI. Both the House of Representatives and the Senate have demanded enquiries due to significant transparency and accountability concerns.

Evaluations of SSI's effectiveness indicate that between 2015 and 2019, over 11,000 attacks on schools were documented, affecting more than 22,000 students and educators in at least 90 countries. In Nigeria, government forces combat various insurgent groups, with Boko Haram explicitly targeting education. Boko Haram's name translates to "education is forbidden", and the group has conducted numerous attacks on schools, teachers, and students, notably the 2014 Chibok abduction. Since 2009, the insurgency has resulted in 611 teacher deaths, 19,000 displaced teachers, 910 damaged or destroyed schools, and over 1,500 school closures. Consequently, around 900,000 children are deprived of education, with 75% of children in IDP camps not attending school. In Borno State, 70% of primary school-aged girls are out of school, the highest rate in the country. In Zamfara State, 168 schools remain closed (Nwaogu, 2024).

The national home-grown school feeding programme

President Muhammadu Buhari's administration has implemented several key policies aimed at increasing school enrolment across Nigeria. One of the flagship initiatives is the National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme,

designed to provide free meals to students. This initiative not only addresses hunger but also incentivises school attendance, significantly reducing the number of out-of-school children in the region. Furthermore, the government has focused on establishing new schools to improve educational accessibility.

The National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme enrolled about 10.27 million pupils in public primary schools in the Northwest and North-Central of Nigeria, according to a survey by the News Agency of Nigeria, as cited in Premium Times (2018). Hence, both northern regions recorded a 20% increase in school enrolment, excluding states like Kebbi, Jigawa, and Benue.

According to the survey data retrieved by the News Agency of Nigeria, Sokoto State saw a 26.7% and 27% increase in enrolment rates between the 2016 and 2018 academic sessions. In the same vein, Taraba State recorded a 5% increase in the number of school enrolments in the 2016–2017 academic session (560,083 in the 2015–2016 academic session against the 532,000 recorded in the 2016–2017 session). Nasarawa State experienced an increase, with the 2016 figure standing at 347,340 as opposed to 287,235 recorded in 2015. Kaduna State encountered a sharp increase in enrolment rates, from 1.5 million in 2016 to 1.8 million pupils in 2017. The federal government's inability to reimburse the state government for feeding school-age children from primary 1–6 instead of primary 4–6, which falls under the state government's jurisdiction, led to the programme's temporary suspension in 2016, despite its partial implementation in 2016.

Based on the researcher's observations after review of some literature, the programme has had a positive impact in the following ways:

1. It enabled parents who have lost their means of livelihood under the humanitarian crisis, such as insecurity and flood-induced displacements and destructions of lives and properties, to be relieved of their ward feeding responsibilities since their wards are fed freely in the school.
2. Since their basic food needs, primarily breakfast, have been met and hunger, a major distraction, has been decisively addressed, schoolchildren's attention to classroom instruction has also increased.
3. The programme also provided an avenue for some farmers and cooks, who ordinarily would not have the capital to start massive production, to render services in exchange for some wages.
4. Orphans, whose parents have been killed or separated due to insecurity and flood, who reside among their family relations, are from low backgrounds, and are registered in public institutions, also benefited from the programme.

In recognition of the negative aspect of the programme, the following observations are hereby noted below:

1. Despite the success in increasing enrolment rates, the available school facilities were insufficient to accommodate the growing number of schoolchildren. Similarly, the programme primarily benefited pupils in primary grades 1–3, neglecting those in pre-nursery who required liquid foods like milk for healthy growth. This made some of them cry, disrupting their attention to classroom instructions.
2. The selection and recruitment of farmers and cooks who will pioneer the implementation of the programme based on the services they render was highly politicised.
3. Irregularities in terms of settling food vendors at the end of the month were encountered. This negatively impacted both the quality and quantity of meals served.

Personal communication (March 15, 2025) with some teachers in Delta State revealed some interesting yet mixed realities about the programme. First, some of the head teachers affirmed that the school feeding programme instigated a new wave of population fabrication among many schools in the state. This is because the higher the enrolment rates, the greater the likelihood that the schools will attract an increased budget for more supplies. They also disclosed that some food vendors provided food for two weeks or until the midterm session, but during the remaining weeks before the term ended, they were nowhere to be found. The federal government's late salary or stipend payment may have contributed to this negative attitude among the food vendors.

However, the programme's success is tempered by significant challenges. Despite the positive outcomes in enrolment figures, the persistent issue of insecurity, marked by frequent attacks on schools and kidnappings, remains a formidable obstacle. These security threats undermine the educational environment, deterring

attendance and leading to school closures. Furthermore, inadequate funding coupled with corruption continues to be a critical issue, limiting the scope and effectiveness of these child protection programmes in Nigeria. For example, the National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme, which was situated under the National Social Investment Programme (NSIP), was discontinued since the minister in charge of the programme was accused of having mismanaged about N37.1 billion. A similar illogical act occurred during the Covid-19 lockdown when the former minister Sadiya Farouk claimed to have fed school children in Ogun and Lagos States alongside Abuja to the tune of N500 million (Adesomoju, 2021; Daily Trust, 2024).

Table 1: Analysis of survey on humanitarian crisis and child protection in Nigeria

Demographic details of respondents		
Gender		
Male	42	38.9%
Female	66	61.1%
Total	108	100%
Age		
18–30	36	33.3%
31–40	54	50%
41–50	12	11.1%
51–60	5	4.6%
61 years and above	1	0.9%
Total	108	100%
Occupation		
Security personnel	5	4.6%
Educational professional	41	38%
Businessmen/women	14	13%
Student	22	20.4%
Government official	8	7.4%
Social worker	2	1.9%
Analyst	1	0.9%
Teacher	1	0.9%
Legal practitioner	1	0.9%
Chef	1	0.9%
Field service technician	1	0.9%
Nurse	1	0.9%
Realtor	1	0.9%
Pharmacist	1	0.9%
Banking	1	0.9%
Corper	1	0.9%
Government child	1	0.9%
Baker	2	1.9%
Photographer	1	0.9%
Engineer	1	0.9%

CSO	1	0.9%
Total	108	100%
State of residence		
Delta State	36	33.3%
FCT/Abuja	29	26.9%
Enugu State	12	11.1%
Ebonyi State	7	6.5%
Lagos State	7	6.5%
Kogi State	2	1.9%
Niger State	2	1.9%
Anambra State	2	1.9%
Edo State	2	1.9%
Abia State	1	0.9%
Yobe State	1	0.9%
Benue State	1	0.9%
Bayelsa State	1	0.9%
Bauchi State	1	0.9%
Nasarawa State	1	0.9%
Ogun State	1	0.9%
Rivers State	1	0.9%
Kaduna State	1	0.9%
Total	108	100%

Source: Online survey, 2025.

Table 1 above shows the demographic data of the respondents. As per gender, out of the 108 respondents, 66 (61.1%) were female and 42 (38.9%) male, showing a female-dominated sample.

In terms of age distribution, the largest group was 31–40 years (50%), followed by 18–30 years (33.3%), while 11.1% were between 41 and 50 years, 4.6% were 51–60 years, and only 0.9% were 61 years and above, indicating that the sample leaned heavily toward a younger and middle-aged population.

Occupationally, the majority were educational professionals (38%), followed by students (20.4%) and businessmen/women (13%), with smaller groups including government officials (7.4%), security personnel (4.6%), and a wide range of other professions such as social workers, teachers, legal practitioners, nurses, engineers, and artisans, each constituting less than 2% of the sample.

Geographically, participation was spread across several states in Nigeria, with the majority drawn from Delta State (33.3%), Enugu State (11.1%), and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja (26.9%), with other states like Ebonyi, Lagos, Anambra, Niger, Kogi, Ogun, Benue, and a few others making up smaller proportions. The demographics reveal a diverse but uneven distribution, with strong representation from younger, female, and education-related respondents, mostly concentrated in Delta, Enugu, and Abuja.

Table 2: Analysis of questionnaire responses

S/N	Items	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	Insecurity and flooding in Northern Nigeria have significantly disrupted children's access to education and healthcare	54 (50%)	42 (38.9%)	5 (4.6%)	4 (3.7%)	3 (2.8%)
2	The humanitarian crisis in Nigeria has led to a rise in the number of internally displaced children and orphans	54 (50%)	43 (39.8%)	4 (3.7%)	5 (4.6%)	2 (1.9%)
3	Child labour, child soldiering, and street hawking have increased due to the loss of parental livelihood caused by insecurity and floods	37 (34.3%)	57 (52.8%)	5 (4.6%)	7 (6.5%)	2 (1.9%)
4	The Safe School Initiative has been effective in protecting schools from attacks by armed groups	9 (8.3%)	35 (32.4%)	21 (19.4%)	24 (22.2%)	19 (17.6%)
5	Many internally displaced children do not have access to formal education in IDP camps	35 (32.4%)	50 (46.3%)	15 (13.9%)	5 (4.6%)	3 (2.8%)
6	The use of schools as IDP shelters has negatively affected their role as educational institutions	27 (25%)	50 (46.3%)	21 (19.4%)	8 (7.4%)	2 (1.9%)
7	The destruction of healthcare facilities in conflict zones has worsened child mortality due to preventable diseases	53 (49.1%)	43 (39.8%)	6 (5.6%)	3 (2.8%)	3 (2.8%)
8	The National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme has improved school enrolment in your state or community	11 (10.2%)	26 (24.1%)	28 (25.9%)	28 (25.9%)	15 (13.9%)
9	The recruitment and payment of food vendors under the school feeding programme are transparent and effective	8 (7.4%)	15 (13.9%)	17 (15.7%)	38 (35.2%)	30 (27.8%)
10	Parental negligence and religious ideologies contribute to the exposure of children to abuse, neglect, and exploitation	53 (49.1%)	41 (38.0%)	6 (5.6%)	5 (4.6%)	3 (2.8%)
11	Government efforts to protect children from the effects of insecurity and natural disasters have been adequately funded and effectively implemented	9 (8.3%)	11 (10.2%)	14 (13%)	41 (38%)	33 (30.6%)
12	There is a strong correlation between child malnutrition and the humanitarian crisis in Nigeria	30 (27.8%)	48 (44.4%)	18 (16.7%)	9 (8.3%)	3 (2.8%)
13	Most children in IDP camps lack access to clean water, proper nutrition, and health services	48 (44.4%)	41 (38%)	9 (8.3%)	8 (7.4%)	2 (1.9%)
14	Ubuntu's philosophy of communal care is undermined when communities fail to protect vulnerable children	24 (22.2%)	54 (50%)	27 (25%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (2.8%)
15	Political corruption and bureaucratic bottlenecks have limited the success of child protection initiatives in Nigeria	49 (45.4%)	44 (40.7%)	8 (7.4%)	2 (1.9%)	5 (4.6%)

Source: Online survey, 2025.

The first item on the table revealed that half of the respondents (50%) strongly agreed that insecurity and flooding in Northern Nigeria significantly disrupt children's access to education and healthcare, with another 38.9% agreeing. Furthermore, respondents overwhelmingly recognised the negative outcomes of crises: 87.1% reported increased child labour, child soldiers, and street hawking. Likewise, 78.7% agreed that many internally displaced children lack access to formal education in IDP camps. Furthermore, 71.3% acknowledged that schools' use as IDP shelters undermines their educational role. However, only 40.7% agreed that the Safe School Initiative protects schools effectively, while 59.3% expressed doubt or disagreement. Similarly, the National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme drew split opinions: only 34.3% believed it improved enrolment, while nearly 65% were neutral or disagreed.

Consequently, the humanitarian crisis was strongly linked to health risks, with 88.9% agreeing that destruction of healthcare facilities worsens child mortality. A similar pattern appeared for child malnutrition, with 72.2% linking it to the crisis. Moreover, 82.4% affirmed that children in IDP camps lack access to clean water, nutrition, and healthcare, reinforcing the urgency of intervention. Furthermore, most respondents (87.1%) acknowledged that parental negligence and rigid religious ideologies contribute to child abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Additionally, 72.2% noted that Ubuntu's philosophy of communal care is undermined when communities fail to protect children, indicating a perceived erosion of social responsibility. Also, respondents expressed strong doubts about government efforts, with only 18.5% agreeing that government initiatives are adequately funded and effective, while 68.6% disagreed. Lastly, it was revealed that political corruption and bureaucratic bottlenecks were major barriers, with 86.1% agreeing these factors limit child protection initiatives.

Discussion

The findings from the survey reveal a clear consensus that insecurity and flooding in Nigeria have profoundly disrupted children's access to both education and healthcare. Half of the respondents strongly agreed, while more than a third agreed, making it evident that humanitarian crises are widely recognised as a barrier to children's welfare. This finding is similar to the findings of Mfon (2024), Daily Trust (2024), Punch (2023), and Vanguard (2018). There is also strong recognition of the rise in negative coping mechanisms. A vast majority of respondents agreed that child labour, child soldiering, and street hawking have increased as families lose their livelihoods to insecurity and floods. Many also confirmed that children in IDP camps are denied formal education and that the use of schools as shelters has undermined their educational role. These findings are in line with the findings of Ugo (2024) and Oladoyin, Osimen, & Dada (2024).

Furthermore, it was revealed that initiatives such as the Safe School Initiative have their role in protecting schools from armed groups, although the majority expressed doubt or outright disagreement about their effectiveness. The National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme also drew mixed views. Only a minority believed it had improved school enrolment; this contrasts the findings from Premium Times (2018), which reported that it indeed improved the enrolment rate, while most were either neutral or disagreed, particularly on issues of transparency and fairness in the recruitment and payment of food vendors. This shows that while such programmes exist, their implementation is plagued with credibility gaps and inefficiencies. These findings are in tandem with the findings of Jacob & Musa (2021) and Daily Trust (2024).

Also, concerns around children's health were even more pronounced in the findings of this study. Nearly nine out of ten respondents agreed that the destruction of healthcare facilities in conflict zones has worsened child mortality from preventable diseases. A similar proportion linked child malnutrition directly to the humanitarian crisis, while a majority also affirmed that children in IDP camps suffer from lack of clean water, nutrition, and healthcare services. These results emphasise how the crisis has deepened health vulnerabilities for children, leaving them exposed to diseases and hunger. The findings of Checchi et al. (2023) corroborate these findings. Additionally, beyond material conditions, social and cultural issues were also raised. Respondents largely agreed that parental negligence and certain religious ideologies contribute to children's exposure to abuse, neglect, and exploitation. There was also concern that communal care, reflected in the Ubuntu philosophy, is being undermined as communities fail to protect their most vulnerable members. This suggests that the humanitarian crisis has weakened both family-level and community-level protective structures. These findings are in line with the findings of Aborisade et al. (2023) and Premium Times (2025).

Finally, the findings revealed that government responsibility was called into question. Only a small fraction of respondents believed that government efforts to protect children from insecurity and natural disasters are adequately funded or effectively implemented. Instead, most expressed strong agreement that corruption and

bureaucratic bottlenecks have limited the success of child protection initiatives in Nigeria. The general perception from the responses is that while policies and programmes exist on paper, their impact is severely hindered by mismanagement, poor funding, and systemic corruption. These findings are in tandem with the findings of Shadare (2022), Nwaogu (2024), and Daily Trust (2024).

Conclusion

This study, through Ubuntu and systems theories, examined how humanitarian crises in the form of insecurity and flooding have undermined child protection, despite the Nigerian government's child protection programmes implemented so far. The study found that floods and insecurity remained a major driver responsible for displacements and the loss of livelihoods in Nigeria. However, both humanitarian crises have hampered the accessibility and affordability of education and healthcare for children due to the destruction of over 700 health facilities and the destruction and shutting down of over 910 and 1,500 schools, respectively. As such, the war against illiteracy is yet to be defeated, as 68 million Nigerians are illiterate and 20 million school-age children are out of school. Furthermore, over 7,000 children are recruited as child soldiers, another 800,000 child-related deaths occur due to preventable diseases, and 11 million children suffer from food poverty, as well as 17.5 million children being orphaned. The study further discovered that the government's child protection efforts, including the Safe School Initiative and the National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme, were both marred by corruption, a lack of funding, and insufficient bottom-up supervision. This is the reason why the Safe School Initiative, despite over \$40 million donated, failed to secure schools against humanitarian crises. On the other hand, the National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme claimed to have spent N500 million feeding schoolchildren during the Covid-19 lockdown period. These crises have hindered children's development, violated their fundamental human rights, and will likely lead to further doom for Nigeria, the populous African country where children, the future hope of tomorrow, continue to suffer from poverty and an unsustainable future lacking care, education, health, and other basic necessities of life.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion above, the following recommendations are hereby put forward:

1. The Nigerian Government, through the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management, should probe all child protection programmes to chart a new and sustainable means of funding them as well as directing their implementation through a bottom-up community participation approach.
2. There is a need to train the School Protection Squad, a special education-related humanitarian personnel, through meaningful collaborations with the Ministries of Education, Interior, Environment and Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Alleviation. This school protection squad will double for fighting, preventing and signalling insecurity and flood-related threats to schools around the 774 local government areas in Nigeria.
3. The Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Alleviation should collaborate to find effective solutions to combat food insecurity in Nigeria. This will ensure children are food-secured.
4. The Nigerian government should prioritise adequate and sustainable funding for education and health. Repair and revamp destroyed critical infrastructures, as this will help reduce the burden of illiteracy and child mortality and wastage relating to preventable diseases.
5. The Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Alleviation should be fully funded and well monitored, with the aim of giving children and their parents the opportunity to participate in making decisions that affect their welfare, survival, and livelihood.

Acknowledgement

The author wishes to acknowledge TETFUND (Tertiary Education Trust Fund) for magnanimously sponsoring this research work. We do not take this for granted as we strive to further push the frontiers of knowledge beyond the shores of Nigeria.

References

- Abdulrahim, A., Gulumbe, B.H., Faggo, A.A., Usman, N.I., Yusuf, Z.M., & Abubakar, T.M. (2023). The bandit and insurgent attacks on health and education infrastructure hinder access to primary healthcare and education in northern Nigeria. *International Journal of Social Science Research and Review*, 6(6), 160–166.
- Aborisade, R., Adeleke, O., Adegoke, N., Ebobo, U., Ogunmefun, F., Chineyemba, L., & Adedayo, S. (2023). Child sexual abuse in Nigeria: Exploring vulnerability and prevention from a policing perspective. *Journal of Social Service Research*, 49(4), 461–475.
- Achilli, L. (2024). Caught in the crossfire: Unravelling the complex interplay of exploitation and agency in children associated with Boko Haram. *Anti-Trafficking Review*, (22), 12–33.
- Adesomoju, A. (2021, March 27). COVID-19 lockdown: Minister insists N500m was spent on school feeding in two states, Abuja. *Premium Times*. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/451639-covid-19-lockdown-minister-insists-n500m-was-spent-on-school-feeding-in-two-states-abuja.html>
- Aina, D. (2024, September 17). Floods sacked 404 million from Nigerian schools, others – World Bank. *Punch Newspapers*. <https://punchng.com/floods-sacked-404-million-from-nigerian-schools-others-world-bank>
- Asamoah, K., & Yeboah-Assiamah, E. (2019). Ubuntu philosophy for public leadership and governance praxis: Revisiting the ethos of Africa's collectivism. *Journal of Global Responsibility*, 10(4), 307–321.
- Baba-Ibrahim, Z. (2024, April 23). In northeast Nigeria, those who fled conflict are being returned to conflict. *The New Humanitarian*. <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2024/04/23/northeast-nigeria-those-who-fled-conflict-are-being-returned>
- Berrick, J.D., Gilbert, N., & Skivenes, M. (2023). Child protection systems across the world. In J.D. Berrick, N. Gilbert, & M. Skivenes (Eds.), *Oxford handbook of child protection systems* (pp. 1–22). Oxford University Press.
- BusinessDay. (2024, March 11). Schools in 14 states face security threats, kidnappings. *BusinessDay*. <https://businessday.ng/news/article/schools-in-14-states-face-security-threats-kidnappings/>
- Checchi, F., Jarvis, C.I., Van Zandvoort, K., & Warsame, A. (2023). Mortality among populations affected by armed conflict in northeast Nigeria, 2016 to 2019. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 120(30), 221–260.
- Daily Trust. (2022, April 1). Child soldiers' population hits 460 million. <https://dailytrust.com/child-soldiers-population-hits-460-million/>
- Daily Trust. (2024, January 12). Tinubu suspends social investment programme amid corruption probe. *Daily Trust*. <https://dailytrust.com/breaking-tinubu-suspends-national-social-investment-programme-amid-corruption-probe>
- Daily Trust. (2024, May 27). Children's Day: Four major crises facing Nigerian children. *Daily Trust*. <https://dailytrust.com/childrens-day-four-major-crises-facing-nigerian-children/>
- Dataphyte. (2023, June 20). Natural disasters displaced more Nigerians than conflicts and violence in 2022. <https://www.dataphyte.com/latest-reports/natural-disasters-displaced-more-nigerians-than-conflicts-and-violence-in-2022/>
- Denscombe, M. (2002). *Ground rules for good research*. Open University Press.
- Dike, H.I. (2017). *A modern textbook in education technology*. Callic Publishers.
- Etieyibo, E. (2017). Ubuntu and the environment. In *The Palgrave handbook of African philosophy* (pp. 633–657). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Falaju, J. (2024, October 24). 7.5 million Nigerian children are orphaned – SOS Children Village. *The Guardian Nigeria*. <https://guardian.ng/news/nigeria/17-5-million-nigerian-children-are-orphaned-sos-children-village/>
- Gever, V.C., Talabi, F.O., Talabi, J.M., Adefemi, V.O., Bello, S.A., Oluyemi, A.A., & Apuke, D.O. (2024). Learning through interaction: Impact of interactive radio instructions in improving literacy skills of out-of-school children in IDP camps in Nigeria. *Interactive Learning Environments*, 32(3), 1058–1067.
- Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack. (2018). *Education under attack: Country profile*. https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/eua2018_nigeria.pdf
- Gupta, N.E., Kumar, K., & Sinha, K. (2023). The nexus of war, violence, and rights: A history of war-torn Afghanistan. In *Handbook of research on war policies, strategies, and cyberwars* (p. 18). IGI Global. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-6684-6741-1.ch019>
- Human Rights Watch. (2016, April 11). 'They set the classrooms on fire': Attacks on education in northeast Nigeria. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/04/11/they-set-classrooms-fire/attacks-education-northeast-nigeria>
- International Displacement Monitoring Centre. (2024, May 14). *2024 Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID)*. <https://www.internal-displacement.org/publications/2024-global-report-on-internal-displacement-grid/>

- Jacob, O.N., & Musa, A. (2021). National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP) in Nigeria: Achievement, problems of implementation and way forward. *Pindus Journal of Culture Literature and ELT*, 8, 1–8.
- Katz, I., Katz, C., Andresen, S., Bérubé, A., Collin-Vezina, D., Fallon, B., Fouché, A., Haffejee, S., Masrawa, N., Muñoz, P., Priolo Filho, S.R., Tarabulsky, G., Truter, E., Varela, N., & Wekerle, C. (2021). Child maltreatment reports and child protection service responses during COVID-19: Knowledge exchange among Australia, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Germany, Israel, and South Africa. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 116(Pt 2), 105078. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2021.105078>
- Lutz, D.W. (2009). African Ubuntu philosophy and global management. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 84(Suppl. 3), 313–328.
- Mfon, U.Y. (2024). Climate change outcomes and educational development: Implications of flooding on children's well-being and school attendance in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. In *The climate-health-sustainability nexus: Understanding the interconnected impact on populations and the environment* (pp. 483–503). Springer Nature Switzerland.
- Muriel, A.B. (1995). *Encyclopaedia of professional management* (2nd ed.). Grolier.
- National Bureau of Statistics. (2023). *Nigeria flood impact, recovery, and mitigation assessment report 2022–2023*. <https://nigerianstat.gov.ng/eLibrary/read/1241417>
- Nwaogu, C. (2024). Insecurity: Concern as Safe Schools Initiative gets zero budget. *Leadership*. <https://leadership.ng/insecurity-concern-as-safe-schools-initiative-gets-zero-budget/>
- Ojeleke, O., Groot, W., Bonuedi, I., & Pavlova, M. (2024). The impact of armed conflicts on the nutritional status of children: Evidence from northern Nigeria. *The International Journal of Health Planning and Management*, 39(2), 502–529.
- Ojo, J.S., Oyewole, S., & Aina, F. (2023). Forces of terror: Armed banditry and insecurity in northwest Nigeria. *Democracy and Security*, 1–28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17419166.2023.2164924>
- Okeke, V.S.O., Orji, R.O., & Aniche, E.T. (2014). *Logic and methods of political inquiry: An introductory guide*. Rex Charles and Patrick.
- Okoli, C., & Lortyer, P. (2014). Terrorism and humanitarian crisis in Nigeria: Insights from Boko Haram. *African Security Review*, 14(1), 43.
- Oladoyin, A.M., Osimen, G.U., Adi, I., & Dada, O. (2024). The rising insecurity in Nigeria: Interrogating the linkage between poverty and banditry. *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 30(5), 11406–11415.
- Olugbode, M. (2021, December 2). FG promises to get all children in IDP camps back to school. *This Day*. <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2021/12/02/fg-promises-to-get-all-children-in-idps-camps-back-to-school/>
- Phillips, B.S. (1976). *Social research: Strategy and tactics* (3rd ed.). Macmillan.
- Poirier, T. (2012). The effects of armed conflict on schooling in Sub-Saharan Africa. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 32(2), 341–351.
- Premium Times. (2018, February 11). How Buhari's policies, other factors increased school enrolment across northern Nigeria. *Premium Times*. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/258253-buharis-policies-factors-increased-school-enrolment-across-northern-nigeria.html>
- Premium Times. (2022, July 28). Special report: How insecurity causes malnutrition for millions of Nigerian children. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/544989-special-report-how-insecurity-causes-malnutrition-for-millions-of-nigerian-children.html>
- Premium Times. (2025, February 4). 2024: NHRC records 127 cases of parental neglect of children in Gombe. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/771742-2024-nhrc-records-127-cases-of-parental-neglect-of-children-in-gombe.html>
- Premium Times. (2025, November 13). 850,000 Nigerian children die yearly from preventable causes – Health minister. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/835110-850000-nigerian-children-die-yearly-from-preventable-causes-health-minister.html>
- Punch. (2023, November 20). Floods displaced 650,000 Nigerian children in six years – UNICEF. <https://punchng.com/floods-displaced-650000-nigerian-children-in-six-years-unicef/>
- Punch Editorial Board. (2023, January 18). Huge military spending yielding no result. *Punch Nigeria*. <https://punchng.com/huge-military-spending-yielding-no-result/>
- Punch Editorial Board. (2023, May 21). Buhari years: Despite much rhetoric, insecurity triumphs. *Punch Nigeria*. <https://punchng.com/buhari-years-despite-much-rhetoric-insecurity-triumphs/>
- Punch Editorial Board. (2025, August 17). Acute child malnutrition in the North. *Punch Newspapers*. <https://punchng.com/acute-child-malnutrition-in-the-north/>
- Ramose, M. (2015). Ecology through ubuntu. In *Environmental values: Emerging from cultures and religions of the ASEAN region* (pp. 69–76).

- Reliefweb. (2024, March 26). Nigeria humanitarian needs overview 2024. <https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/nigeria-humanitarian-needs-overview-2024>
- Save the Children. (2007). *Save the Children definition of child protection*. <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/save-childrens-definition-child-protection/>
- Shadare, G.A. (2022). The governance of Nigeria's social protection: The burdens of developmental welfarism? *Societies*, 12(1), 20.
- The Cable. (2024, May 24). Climate change and Nigeria's flooding reality. *The Cable*. <https://www.thecable.ng/climate-change-and-nigerias-flooding-reality/>
- Ugo, U.S. (2024). Impact of street hawking on children's academic wellbeing: A critical assessment. *IDOSR Journal of Communication and English*, 9(2), 7–11.
- UNICEF. (2022, October 21). More than 1.5 million children at risk as devastating floods hit Nigeria. *UNICEF*. <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/more-15-million-children-risk-devastating-floods-hit-nigeria>
- Vanguard. (2024, March 16). Students' kidnap: Tomorrow's leaders now today's targets. *Vanguard*. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2024/03/students-kidnap-tomorrows-leaders-now-todays-targets/>
- Vanguard Nigeria. (2018, December 7). 38% of Nigerians are illiterates. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2018/12/38-of-nigerians-are-illiterates/>